CONTRIBUTIONS

TO THE

History of Islamic Civilization.

(CONTAINING A TRANSLATION OF VON KREMER'S CULTURGESCHICHTLICHE STREIFZÜGE AUF DEM GEBIETE DES ISLAMS.)

BY

S. KHUDA BUKHSH, M.A., B.C.L.,

Bar.-at-Law.

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false prophet and a corrupter of youth, but also a common cheat and a son of destruction, leading away weak souls from truth by holding out to them worldly attractions of the most sensual nature. Reference has already been made to the Byzantines who, in their own interest, sought to cast dirt on Islam. But, however inclined they might have been to foist false and foreign principles upon Islam, they could scarcely deny certain points of resemblance between Islam and Christianity. To explain away these very points of agreement and resemblance between the two religions, they eagerly adopted the fiction that Mohammed was, by birth, a Christian. We will, therefore, turn to Theophanes in whom we get the earliest Christian account of the rise of Islam, which, being accepted and incorporated by Anastasius in his Church history, received extensive circulation. It embraces almost all the leading features of the Mohammed-fables of the Middle Ages. History, tradition and fiction are all inextricably blended together, We read there of Mohammed's poverty, his marriage with Khadījah, his commercial journeys—pure historical facts—along with unfounded statements such as this, that the Prophet studied Judaism and Christianity from their respective books. Moreover we make our acquaintance here with the fable, later on repeated with a peculiar zest, that Mohammed invented the story of his intercourse with the angel Gabriel in order to allay the anxiety of Khadījah for the epileptic fits with which he was often seized. In Theophanes, further, a monk, who had been expelled from the Church for heresy, appears on the scene as the lover of Khadījah. This monk is said to have confirmed the claim and statement of Mohammed regarding his prophetic mission and thereby lent assistance to him. It is noteworthy that though from the 11th century onward books were unceasingly written upon Islam and

subjects connected with it, yet they were purely controversial and vituperative. As such they were mere reckless and thoughtless reproductions of strangest falsehoods. Never was a serious attempt made to understand Islam or to study the life of Mohammed. We might mention, in passing, that almost contemporaneously with the activity of Raymond, the Archbishop of Toledo, in the translation of Arabic works on Philosophy, an attempt was being made by Peter the Venerable of Cluni, to obtain translations of the Qur'ān and theological works.

Peter the Venerable, the stout champion of Catholic orthodoxy, deploring the want of materials for carrying on an energetic struggle against Islam and reproving the Christians for hitherto neglecting and failing to supply it, embarked upon a settled plan of campaign. The starting point was naturally to be the Qur'ān and for this reason he had it translated into Latin. The history of this first translation is not without interest. Perhaps it would be a misnomer to call it a translation at all, inasmuch as Robert did not translate it literally, but 'only gave the sense of the Arabic text as well as he could.'[1] For the life of Robert we have the sole authority of Leland, but Leland is silent as to the source from which he obtains his information. Robert the Englishman, is said to have travelled through France, Italy, Dalmatia and Greece into Asia where he learnt Arabic. About July 1136 he seems to have settled down in Barcelona under the patronage of Plato of Tivoli, and by 1141—1143 he apparently was living 'near the Ebro' with a friend Hermann, the Dalmetian, for the purposes of studying Arabic. Subsequently he became the

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[1] Dict. of National Biography, p. 362, Vol. XLVIII.

Archdeacon of Pampeluna. In 1141 Peter the Venerable, employed the services of Robert and Hermann for translating certain Arabic books into Latin. The result was that four translations were given out to the world, with a preface, from the pen of Peter. "Of these four works in this volume, says my friend, Mr. T. A. Archer, which afterwards formed materials for Peter the Venerable's treatise against Mohammedanism, Robert translated a 'Chronica mendosa et ridiculosa Saracenorum', *i.e.*, An account of Mohammed's ancestry and life, together with a history of the Caliphs down to the death of Yazid I and the murder of Husain (10th April 680 A.D.) and a translation of the Qur'ān with preface by the translator and addressed to Peter the Venerable."

We have it from Robert himself that he finished his translation of the Qur'ān between 16th July and 31st December 1143.

The works of Peter the Venerable open an era of polemics against Islam. He is the chief source from which the mediæval Christians received their notions of Islam. Henceforward we have an unceasing torrent of invectives against Islam in almost all the European languages. Some writers even ventilated their venom against the Prophet and his religion in verse; for instance, Walter of Sens treated the life of Mohammed in Latin, while Alexander Du Pont in French verse. Robert's translation of the Qur'ān was apparently widely known in the Middle Ages. Alberich of Trois-Fontaines, who flourished in the thirteenth century, seems to have been aware of it, but does not appear to have used it. Very often, indeed, we have polemical treatises against Islam cast in the shape of a report of a real or imaginary discussion between Christians and Muslim theologians. It is undoubted, however, that discussions

did take place and were even frequent; for instance, a discussion is reported to have taken place in Aleppo, in 1215, in the presence of a son of Saladin between a monk called George and three Muslim theologians. Raymond Lullus also informs us of a discussion which took place in 1309 at Bugia. At this discussion a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim, one after another explain their faith to a heathen who, after carefully weighing the evidence, decides in favour of Christianity.[1]

The most unjust charge constantly laid at the door of the Muslims by mediæval writers, is that of idolatry.

We can hardly be called upon to seriously refute it. Still it is curious, indeed, that we should be repeatedly told that Muslims worshipped Mohammad as a God. "Belief in Mohammed and our other Gods" is put in the mouth of a Muslim by an authority on the Crusades. Some writers, indeed, call Mohammed "the God of the heathens" who is daily worshipped and glorified. In Arnold, of Lübeck, Saladin is made to say, after the battle of Hittin, to the captured prince: "Thou hast felt my exalted hand through the power of my God, Mohammed," and the following is the answer put in the mouth of one of the Christian knights: "That Mohammed, the son of ruin whom thou callest thy God, we despise, deny and curse." In the report of the False Turpin, regarding the expedition of Charles the Great to Spain, Mohammed is constantly spoken of as the God of the Muslims and, according to Matthew, Paris, Mohammed was worshipped by Muslims precisely as Christ was by Christians.

The Saracens are alleged to have called out: "O Mohammed and ye other Gods." By Mohammed and all other

[1] Prutz, p. 75.

Gods they are made to swear in mediæval writings. It is reported that when Tancred, after the conquest of Jerusalem, entered the mosque which had been built at the place where formerly was a temple, he found such a heavy silver image of Mohammed that several men could not lift it. Even Fulcher of Chartres pretends to have heard of an idol, an image of Mohammed, set up at that very mosque. Jacob of Vitry, moreover, asserts that whenever Muslims were in possession of Jerusalem they set up in the quondam Temple an image of their Prophet and forbade Christians access thereto. It was even said of Muslims that before undertaking an expedition against the Christians they consulted an idol called Mahomet, *i.e.*, Mohammed. These stories, bearing upon their face the stamp of falsehood, were largely invented and freely put in circulation. They sprang up in luxuriant abundance at the time of the Crusades. We have already alluded to the reasons for such fabrications. Guibert of Nogent[1] presents, for the first time, the scattered fragments of the Mohammed-fables of the Middle Ages in a compact and connected whole, but he is honest enough to tell us, that his information is entirely based upon the popular tradition handed down from mouth to mouth. He had no idea even as to the time when the Prophet lived, but, says Guibert, he could not have lived in remote antiquity inasmuch as a doctor of the Church has written against his evil deeds.

The following, according to Guibert, are the Chief events in the life of Mohammed. A hermit of somewhat doubtful faith and virtue tried unsuccessfully for the Patriarchate of Alexandria. Foiled in his attempts he meditated revenge upon the Church and accordingly he betook to solitude. The devil, making use of his ill-humour,

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1 Guizot, collection des mémoires relatifs a l'histoire de France, IX, pp. 23 *et seq*.

counselled him to employ, for his evil design, a youth who was to shortly present himself to him. This youth was no other than Mohammed. The hermit, knowing how to win him over for this purpose, helped him in his marriage with Khadījah, who, upon the representations of the hermit that Mohammed was a God-sent prophet, decided to accept a poor, low-born husband for herself. Mohammed, however, was soon seized with epileptic fits, and Khadījah, frightened and alarmed at this malady, hastened to the hermit for an explanation. She was, thereupon, assured that the apparent epilepsy was only the condition in which Mohammed was honoured with divine revelations. Mohammed gradually but steadily began to gain ground and earn the reputation of a prophet. The monk, then, suggested to him to present his doctrines in the form of a code and confirm it by a miracle. The faithful were accordingly ordered to fast for three days. Then Mohammed in a solemn assembly announced to them of the impending revelation and behold! there suddenly appeared specially trained for the purpose by Mohammed—a cow with the book of revelation "between his horns" and knelt down before the Prophet. Since then, says Guibert, no one entertained any doubt regarding Mohammed's prophetic mission, and the new teaching, founded on vile deceit, rapidly spread among the people. Of the contents of this book Guibert evidently knows nothing beyond that it has thrown wide open the door for the worst sensual indulgences and sanctioned wildest excesses in that sphere. The end which he ascribes to Mohammed is quite in keeping with the rest of the legend. While walking by himself Mohammed is attacked by his malady, falls unconscious on the ground and is devoured by pigs right up to his heels, which alone remained of him.

This incident, it may be mentioned, is said by the mediæval writers to be the reason of the abstinence of the